

Testimony for White House Conference on Aging

Good afternoon. I'm Michael Rodgers, vice president of public policy and advocacy for the Catholic Health Association (CHA), and I am pleased to be here today speaking on behalf of the Catholic health ministry. The Catholic health ministry provides services to older Americans across the continuum of care. Members of CHA include tertiary, community, and rural hospitals; long-term acute care and sub-acute care; nursing facilities, assisted living, and senior housing programs; home health, hospice, and community-based care; PACE sites; adult day care; and respite services.

We know from direct experience what others, including the Institute of Medicine, have documented well: that today's health care delivery system often fails to provide consistent, competent care and is ill-equipped to meet the needs of seniors of the future.

For the past year, CHA has examined the current health care delivery system in an effort to identify what we, as a significant segment of the field, could do to transform this system to better meet the future needs of our nation.

Our examination showed that, while often breathtakingly effective, our current system frequently:

- Lacks coordination and is duplicative and fragmented;
- Includes errors and other quality problems;
- Is slow to transfer knowledge to the practice setting and does not follow proven protocols;
- Reacts to episodes of illness rather than preventing them;
- Provides differing care to patients according to their race, income, and other personal characteristics; and
- Is too expensive, given other human needs.

We have concluded that transforming the health care delivery system into a more competent and effective system will require:

- A *national will* to improve access, quality, and cost effectiveness of all services needed by seniors;
- A *transfer of knowledge* from what we know to what we do;
- *Public policies* that support an improved system.

The White House Conference on Aging is being convened at an ideal time to influence the course of health care delivery for older persons. It can help generate momentum among consumers of services, providers of care, government agencies, payers, and other stakeholders to insist that health care for frail and older persons becomes more:

- *Transparent*, so that consumers have the information they need to make decisions about where to receive care and their course of treatment;
- *Accessible*, including a full continuum of services—nursing and medical care, assisted living, alternate housing arrangements, care management, and home and community-based services;
- *Respectful*, giving patients and consumers ownership and control of their medical information, decisions concerning where they receive services and their treatment plan, and assistance to stay in their own homes as long as possible;
- *Safe and beneficial*, avoiding preventable deaths and injuries and missed opportunities for care and cure;
- *Coordinated* among health professionals and sites of services;
- *Oriented* to chronic disease with optimal use of disease management and evidence-based medicine; and
- *Focused* on prevention of illness and promotion of health, maximizing the health and independence of older persons.

The Catholic Health Association is committed to these principles and plans to do its part to demonstrate that they will lead to an improved health care delivery system. As a beginning, we are developing disease management for the most prevalent medical conditions – obesity and diabetes – among our 800,000 employees because we believe that care coordination is a necessary requirement for an effective and efficient system.

We urge the White House Conference, as it shapes its agenda for the meeting in October 2005, to take on the difficult but critically important issue of improving the health care delivery system for America's seniors, and we will gladly offer any assistance you may require.